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WALTER ALLEN WATSON.

Judge Watson, as he was familiarly known, was a son of the late Meredith and Josephine (Robertson) Watson, and was born at the plantation home of his father and grandfather, "Woodland"; near Jennings Ordinary, Nottoway County, Virginia, November 25th, 1867, and died at the Episcopal Ear, Eye and Throat Hospital, Washington, D. C., on December 24th, 1919, of mastoiditis. He was buried at "Woodland" December 26th, 1919. Judge Watson was elected to the Sixty-third Congress from the Fourth Congressional District in November 1912, and was re-elected to the Sixty-fourth, Sixty-fifth and Sixty-sixth Congresses without opposition.

His ancestors for five generations sleep in the soil of Amelia, Prince Edward, Lunenburg and Nottoway Counties. His early education was received at old-field schools, and he then went to Hampden-Sidney and the University of Virginia.

The death of his father left him in early life the head of a large and dependent family. In 1905 he married Miss Constance Tinsley, of Richmond, who survives him. He was admitted to the bar in 1893 and practiced the profession of his choice and love without worries, and no man was ever denied his services because he was not able to pay the price. At the early age of twenty-two he was elected State Senator and at once took rank with the leaders of that body. He was one of the three authors of the "Walton Law" in the Legislature of '94, which, after the failure of the Anderson-McCormick election law, saved Virginia from negro rule until he was disfranchised by a new Constitution. Judge Watson was three times elected Commonwealth's Attorney of Nottoway County and while a resolute, was never a bloodthirsty prosecutor. Always an active Democrat, he was one of those who helped

rescue Nottoway County from the domination of the negro in politics, under which it had long suffered.

Impressed with the evils of negro suffrage and the injury to the white race of the election methods imposed by it, he was one of the first and most earnest advocates of a Constitutional Convention. He was the author of the "Nottoway Resolutions", adopted April 5th, 1900, which at once became the platform of the Convention advocates throughout the State, and which were perhaps the most potent influence exercised in the popular election on that subject. During the canvass *The Richmond Dispatch*, the then State organ of the Democratic party, kept these resolutions in its editorial columns, and on April 21st, quoted with approval a contemporary, who said of one of the "Nottoway Resolutions": "Nothing more courageous has ever been promulgated by any Democratic organization of the State. A steady hand wrote the resolutions, and men of nerve adopted them." And speaking again on the same subject, May 1900: "The Nottoway Resolutions sounded the trump that waked the Democrats of this State to action."—"Therefore we may truly say Nottoway took the lead of the counties in the movement which resulted in the election of a large majority of delegates pledged to give the support of the Democratic party to the Constitutional Convention proposition." On April 15th, Judge Watson was unanimously nominated as delegate to the Constitutional Convention by the Democratic Convention of Amelia and Nottoway and the following resolution was adopted: "Having unbounded confidence in the ability and wisdom of our nominee, we believe it best not to tie or bind his hands, but placing our sacred rights and our welfare in his keeping, we know that he will do what is best for the interests of his constituents and the good of the Commonwealth." He was elected to the Convention without opposition, was placed upon the leading committees dealing most vitally with the negro question in all its phases, and on September 21st, 1901, though the youngest member, was selected to make report of the suffrage committee to the Convention.

He was author of that part of the report of the committee

on education, which is embraced in Section 136, article 9, of the New Constitution, and which has, as far as legally possible, enabled the white people to erect high schools of similar grade. It will be remembered the State school money is apportioned by the Constitution "on the basis of school population," but the article mentioned provides that county, city, and district school taxes may be apportioned and expended on such schools, "as the public welfare may require." The debate on this subject was second in importance only to that upon suffrage, and the leading part was left to Watson.

The great debate of the Convention on this subject was held in secret session of the Democratic members and hence does not appear in the printed reports. In this contest Judge Watson bore an active part and his speech on suffrage, covering two night sessions, attracted wide comment, and concerning this address, said the *Richmond Times*, Jan. 10th, 1902: "Mr. Watson made a very strong and attractive speech and was intently followed by every one present. He concluded a very fine argument in support of the committee report. He was most enthusiastically applauded." And said, *The Richmond Dispatch*, Jan. 10th, 1902: "The majority plan of suffrage will not be presented more entertainingly than Mr. Watson has presented it. He is a speaker of wonderful command of language and has a most pleasing manner of delivery. It is very doubtful if any man in the Convention has given the subject of suffrage closer study than he." And again the same paper said editorially, Jan. 14th, 1902: "Mr. Watson made a great speech. His mastery of the suffrage subject is complete and his arguments cannot but have weight." When the convention adjourned the name of Watson was known throughout the State.

At the age of thirty-six, by unanimous vote of the Democratic members of the General Assembly, he was elected Judge of the Fourth Circuit, and from the moment he took the bench he consecrated his energies earnestly and exclusively to the delicate and difficult work which had been committed to his charge, and in the discharge of these duties, his conduct gave universal satisfaction. At the close of his career on the bench,

he had become almost a National character. Regarding his conduct of the Beattie case, said the *New York Times*, Sept. 10th, 1911: "The trial will be remembered as one of the most impressive in our criminal annals." *The Baltimore Sun*, Sept. 13th, 1911: "It was rendered impressive by Judge Watson, and the way he controlled and ordered it was an object lesson to judges all over the land." *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Sept. 9th, 1911: "Too much cannot be said in praise of the manner in which Judge Watson conducted the trial—there has been nothing finer in the judicial history of Virginia." *The Richmond Virginian*, Sept. 11th, 1911: "Judge Watson comes from the delicate case crowned with honor and meriting the approbation of all men." *News Leader* of Richmond, Sept. 9th, 1911: "What was real admirable in the great criminal trial just closed in Chesterfield, was the Judge who presided. His was the commanding figure in that intensely dramatic struggle; his the clear brain and firm hand that guided and directed with unerring precision its course. He added lustre to the illustrious record of the Virginia Judiciary." *Evening Journal of Richmond*, Sept. 10th, 1911: "Virginia is indebted to this honorable Judge for the finest advertisement the State has had in a decade." *Index Appeal*, Petersburg, Sept. 14th, 1911: "Judge Watson achieved National reputation because of the manner in which he presided at the trial of Beattie. He also conferred upon Virginia lasting honor by reason of the way in which he dispensed justice in that little old Chesterfield Courthouse." *Farmville Herald*, Sept. 15th, 1911: "A great judge and a great man is here in Southside Virginia, doing his duty in so quiet and modest a fashion that his light had remained almost hidden."

He tendered his resignation as Judge, Jan. 20th, 1912. When Judge Watson tendered his resignation, he at once issued a statement that he "was unwilling while occupying judicial station to engage in person upon a political canvass." Concerning his resignation, said the *Richmond Dispatch*, Jan. 12th, 1912: "Because of the fine qualities of the man, because of the honorable and notable record on the bench, which he achieved, the good wishes of good men and true will follow

him wherever he goes." *The News Leader* of same date: "Judge Watson was long a leader in the Virginia Senate and subsequently one of the most useful and distinguished members of the Constitutional Convention. The judiciary suffers a distinct loss in his retirement, but in reëntering politics, he will serve the State. He will go far, for he is a man whom the people delight to honor."

In every position he occupied he accomplished something practical for his people. This gifted and honored son of Nottoway spent all his life in Southside Virginia. He was acquainted with her history and traditions, and being the descendant of generations of farmers, and in hearty sympathy with all the legislative needs of a great agricultural people, he guarded well and faithfully the highest and best interests of all our people. Judge Watson was young, sober and industrious, was an earnest student of history and legislation, State and National. No man in Southside Virginia was so in touch with the leading men of State and Nation as Judge Watson, and when he entered Congress on the fourth of March, 1913, he was not recognized simply as a new member, but as a National character, who at once commanded attention and high regard. Nor did he simply represent a party, but all the people of the Mother Commonwealth of the entire country.

W. R. JONES.

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